# Mesorah Mag

THE MAGAZINE WRITTEN FOR AND BY MESORAH

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## Tu B'Shvat: Jewish Groundhog Day

By Rabbi Avi Schwartz

Hey everyone! We're so happy to see everyone back on campus!

As many of us know, Tu B'Shvat is coming up a week from this upcoming Wednesday night. The holiday is mentioned in the first Mishnah of Maseches Rosh Hashanah with halachic implications about the Maaser (or tithing) of the produce. What's interesting is that even though we're living in America, and not tithing our produce on a daily basis, for some reason it's still a holiday that many of us celebrate. What's so special about this holiday that some of us were even forced to eat carob as children because of it?

I would like to suggest that Tu B'Shvat is a Jewish Groundhog Day.

Let me explain. If we look outside right now, the weather is absolutely gross. It's cold, it's windy, there's no reason to go outside, and yet for some reason, we're celebrating the trees that are barely starting to bloom?

When some of us were kids we learned an Israeli Tu B'Shvat song called "HaShkedya Porachat," "The Almond Tree is Blooming." Although there may not be any leaves on most (non-evergreen) trees, the almond trees are the first trees to sprout little, tiny buds that set the stage for the beautiful flowers and almonds to bloom later in the spring. Even though there might not be so much to look at right now on the tree, we still celebrate the fact that we know that nature renews every year, and we are able to see the light at the end of the wintry tunnel. Just like on Groundhog Day, (assuming that that Punxatawney Phil doesn't see his shadow,) it's a sign that spring is right around the corner.

I still feel that there's more that we can learn. In Devarim (20:19) the pasuk says "כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה" "Man is like a tree in a field," and Tehillim (1:3) makes a similar comparison:" "וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל־פַּלְגֵי מָיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ ו יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ וְעָלֵהוּ לֹא־יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יַצְלִיחַ:" "He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives." Why?

Trees use resources from all around them and as they grow upwards, they produce oxygen for the environment. They take the sun, the water, the nutrients from all around, and they use those resources to make shade, produce fruits, and make homes for different types of animals.

Hashem wants us to be the same way. As we begin our new semester, we should take all of our support systems and use them to build up, and "branch out*." Specifically for this semester, with all of the chaos going around, we still can make sure that Spring 2021 is going to bring a sense of renewal for all of us, and we can use it to keep growing up and branching out to others as a resource for them.

Shabbat Shalom!

*Pun absolutely intended.

**Shabbat**

- **Candle lighting – 4:46pm**
- **Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat – 4:45pm**
- **Oneg @ 94 Richardson – 9:00pm**
- **Shacharit – 9:15am**
- **Sof Zman Kriat Shema – 9:42am**
- **Shabbat Schmooze @ Hillel – 4:00pm**
- **Mincha – 4:30pm**
- **Havdalah – 5:49pm**

**Next Week (*Virtual Event)**

- **Sunday: Breakfast and Learn – After Shacharit**
- ***Tuesday: Chaburah Night – 8:00pm**
- ***Wednesday: The Power of "Nishmat" – 8:00pm**
- ***Thursday: Mishmar – 8:00pm**
- **Shacharit during the week – 8:30am (9am on Sunday)**
- **Mincha/Maariv during the week – 4:50pm**

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**If you would like to write for Mesorah Mag, please speak to Nonnie Sinoff**

# A COVID Winter Break

By Netanel Shedlo

I don't know about you, but I had an amazing winter break. I did so much, met so many people, and really felt like I was using my time to the fullest. Allow me to go through some of the highlights:

On one night of break, my wife and I decided to take a road trip. After carefully deciding between many viable destination options, we decided we were going to venture on the long journey to the kitchen. It has great views of the driveway, awesome 2-star Jewish-style cuisine, and best of all, luxurious folding chairs. Another time, my sister-in-law was staying with us and she expressed how much she wanted to try a kosher Blizzard at the Dairy Queen in New Milford. She said it would only be a half hour drive, even though it was actually one hour. Although we were extremely busy with our incredibly booked schedule, we managed to fit what turned out to be a 3-hour total drive to New Milford and back…including directional mistakes and missed opportunities at views of the city.

My favorite highlight was actually my trip to my favorite grocery store: ShopRite on Route 18. They have so many wonderful foods. At the store, a moment of panic came over me; we needed corn starch, yet ShopRite didn't have any corn starch. I scrambled, asking everyone in the store if they knew where some corn starch might be. I triple-checked every aisle, re-read every flour label, yet came up empty of any corn starch. This is where my story gets exciting. I had to think, where else could corn starch be? And then it hit me; Stop&Shop of Highland Park! My second favorite grocery store. I quickly created a game plan of how I would strategically travel from one grocery store to the other while still making it back home for my 9:00 PM bedtime. Thank Goodness, with some help from the 17-year old half-asleep nightshift worker, I managed to find a box of corn starch and all was well in the Shedlo household.

These were just my travels. I will spare you of the countless hours of fun I spent freezing my toes off outside of several New Brunswick college houses desperate for some social interaction from other zombie-looking students taking a break from their 24-hour Netflix marathons.

I also took it upon myself to eat healthier. Only 2 entire sleeves of Ritz crackers per day as opposed to 3, and only 4 different kinds of cookies/ice cream per day, and not seven. The results of both my dietary changes and my tireless walks from my bedroom to my living room can clearly be seen. All in all, it was quite the exciting break, and I hope it leads into an exciting semester of probably more of the same exact thing.